



Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative Bulletin

“Enhancing the effectiveness of disability activism by organizing and empowering individuals, families, groups, and organizations!”

Empowerment! Opportunity! Justice!

March-April, 2010

To include information in next month’s Bulletin please contact us!

Stan Kosloski, 860-614-8351 or StanKosloski@ct-dac.org
Jayne Kleinman, 203-631-4800 or JayneKleinman@ct-dac.org
Website: <http://www.ct-dac.org/contactus.htm>

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Disability Advocacy Collaborative Regional Contacts

To get involved with one of the Collaborative's Regional Advocacy Networks, contact the following:

- Northwest -- contact: Bill Knight (lackerman01@snet.net) – meetings are held at the Litchfield Arc
- Southwest –contact: Carol Kana (pkana@snet.net) – meetings are held at the Norwalk Police Department
- North Central — contact: Candace Low (clow@independenceunlimited.org) – meetings are held at 151 New Park Avenue in Hartford
- Bridgeport Area – contact: Tony LaCava (tlacava@drfc.org) – meetings are on the third Thursday of the month at various sites.

State Budget Decisions Will Hurt Most Vulnerable

The 2010 session of the Connecticut General Assembly convened on February 3rd. The overriding issue remains the state budget for the current year as well as the next (2010-2011). Latest projections show expected state income falling \$500 million short of expenses for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2010. The Governor has submitted a plan to address the shortfall, and now it's the legislature's turn to take action.

The Governor has called for further budget reductions that will seriously impact the ability of individuals with disabilities, including elders, to live independently. In addition to a reduction in services provided by state agencies, independent living centers, the Brain Injury Association, the Commission on Aging, and similar agencies are fighting for survival. How will the legislature respond?

Below are excerpts from a comprehensive summary of the Governor's proposed budget adjustments compiled by Kate McEvoy, JD, Deputy Director of the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut. We are indebted to Kate for letting us share her material which includes items of interest to older adults and individuals with disabilities.

For the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, the Governor proposes:

Medicaid

- to “implement cost-sharing requirements on individuals receiving Medicaid services”
- to “restrict vision services for adults under Medicaid”
- to suspend the limited vision and non-emergency medical transportation coverage under SAGA (State Administered General Assistance)
- to suspend non-emergency dental services for adults under Medicaid and SAGA

- to adopt the more restrictive SAGA definition of “medical necessity” for purposes of Medicaid coverage (e.g. shift from the current, and broader, definition, which requires “maintenance of an optimal level of health” to services that are “reasonable and necessary” or “appropriate”)

Prescription Drug Coverage

- to expand the preferred drug list to include all mental health drugs
- to limit reimbursement for some drugs
- to “revise Medicare Part D co-pay requirements for dually eligible”
- to suspend balance of funds in various non-entitlement accounts with DSS (e.g. Services for Persons with Disabilities, Community Services)
- to “suspend coverage of most over-the-counter drugs”

Provider Issues

- to eliminate General Fund coverage of attorneys’ fees in SSI appeals, and instead shift these costs to the benefit awards received by clients
- to reduce certain Medicaid provider rates by 5% (and reduce ICF/MR’s and Chronic Disease Hospitals by 2%)
- to reduce SFY’10 funding for the Independent Living Centers by \$110,000
- to repeal the adult day care rate increases

Other

- to suspend the Elder Housing Support Services grant
- to suspend funding for the Elderly Services Transportation Initiative (presumably, ITN), Home Share Program and Senior Center Expansion

For the 2010-2011 fiscal year budget, which takes effect July 1, the Governor proposes:

Legislative Section

- to eliminate funding for all of the legislative commissions, including the Commission on Aging
- to transfer the functions of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (5 full time, 40 part time interpreter positions) from the Legislature to DSS

Human Services Section

- Home and Community-Based Care
 - with respect to the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders:
 - to reduce overall funding by \$10,774,600 from \$75,724,600 to \$64,950,000
 - to reduce funding for the Statewide Respite Program by \$1,000,000 (from \$2,294,388 to \$1,294,388)
- Medical Assistance
 - with respect to scope of coverage:

- to adopt the more restrictive SAGA definition of “medical necessity” for purposes of Medicaid coverage (see above)
 - to eliminate vision coverage (e.g. glasses, contacts, and optometry; ophthalmology would remain covered) under Medicaid (kids under 21 on Husky A would continue to be covered)
 - to further delay implementation of the HIV/AIDS waiver that was authorized in 2006
 - to eliminate the limited vision and non-emergency medical transportation coverage under SAGA
- with respect to cost sharing:
 - to impose \$3 co-payments on most Medicaid services, but note:
 - co-payments would not apply to hospital in-patient, emergency room services, home health, laboratory or transportation
 - the total co-pay obligation per month would be capped at 5% of the involved family’s income
 - co-payments for prescription drugs would be capped at a maximum of \$20 per month
 - a number of groups would be exempt from making co-payments (this includes recipients of SSI, women who are receiving treatment for breast and/or cervical cancer and individuals who reside in institutional settings)

State Prescription Drug Coverage

- to restrict various elements of the state “wrap-around” protection for enrollees of Medicare D, including:
 - further limiting state coverage of Part D co-payments (in 2009, these range from \$1.10 to \$6.00 per prescription), with the result that dually-eligible individuals will be expected to pay up to \$20 per month in co-payments (an increase from the current co-payment of \$15)
 - eliminating funding for non-formulary drugs under the Medicare D wrap-around (the Medicare D Supplemental Needs Fund)(reduction of \$4,330,000)
- with respect to prior authorization requirements:
 - to make prescription drugs for mental health conditions subject to prior authorization requirements, removing the grandfathering protection that was enacted in 2009
- to eliminate state coverage of most over-the-counter drugs – please note: this proposal would not apply to insulin or insulin syringes

• Other

- to eliminate SFY’11 funding for the Independent Living Centers (reduction of \$665,927)
- to suspend enhanced funding for the Independent Transportation Network (ITN) project

MAKE YOUR VOICE! You can reach the Office of the Governor at: (860) 566-4840 - Toll-Free: (800) 406-1527 - TDD: (860) 524-7397 - Email: Governor.Rell@ct.gov

You can reach your legislators by calling:

House Democrats: (800) 842.8267

House Republicans: (800) 842.1423

Senate Democrats: (800) 842.1420

Senate Republicans: (800) 842.1421

You can reach legislative leaders by calling:

Speaker of the House Chris Donovan, (860) 240-8500, or Christopher.Donovan@cga.ct.gov

House Majority Leader Denise Merrill, (860) 240-8500, or Denise.Merrill@cga.ct.gov

Senate President Donald Williams, (860) 240-8600, or Williams@senatedems.ct.gov

Senate Majority Leader Martin Looney, (860) 240-8600, or Looney@senatedems.ct.gov

Senator Toni Harp, Appropriations Committee co-chair, (860) 240-0393 or harp@senatedems.ct.gov

Rep. John Geragosian, Appropriations Committee co-chair, (860) 240-0394 or john.geragosian@cga.ct.gov

Ludlum “Letter to the Editor” on Physician Assisted Suicide Published

Cathy Ludlum of Manchester submitted the following Letter to the Editor of the Hartford Courant, which published it on March 13:

“The Courant has portrayed the issue of physician-assisted suicide in simplistic terms: People in pain from terminal illnesses need a way out, and Connecticut law does not protect doctors who would prescribe lethal prescriptions [Page 1, March 7, “Suit Revives A Painful Debate”].

Oregon's Death with Dignity Act is mentioned, but not Oregon's statistics about why people request aid in dying. From 1998 to 2008, only 23.9 percent of patients wanted death because of "inadequate pain control." A startling 89.9 percent cited "a steady loss of autonomy," 87.4 percent described a "decreasing ability to participate in activities that made life enjoyable" and 83.8 percent feared "a loss of dignity."

These other concerns should not be minimized, but suicide is not the best solution. People with severe disabilities (like me) understand that one can have dignity, autonomy and enjoyment of life in spite of declining physical abilities.

People in Oregon and Washington are dying, and doctors are helping them, because the patients do not have access to this important perspective.

As Connecticut considers legalizing physician-assisted suicide, The Courant needs to cover all perspectives, including the voice of people with disabilities.” Cathy Ludlum, Manchester

Many national organizations have gone on record as opposing legalization of physician assisted suicide, including the AMA, National Council on Disability, National Spinal Cord Injury Association, World Institute on Disability, Justice for All, the American Association of Persons

with Disabilities, National Council on Independent Living, ADAPT, Not Dead Yet, Disability Rights and Education Defense Fund, and TASH.

Compassion and Choices (formerly the Hemlock Society) is promoting legalization of physician assisted suicide in states across the country. In early October, lawyers from Compassion and Choices filed a lawsuit in State Superior Court on behalf of two Fairfield county doctors who want to be able to prescribe lethal prescriptions to patients who have terminal diseases and want to commit suicide. Captioned as *Blick v. Criminal Justice Division*, the suit targets the Connecticut statute that prohibits intentionally assisting another person to commit suicide.

For further information on physician assisted suicide, you can access the DREDF webpage at: www.dredf.org/assisted_suicide/index.shtml.

Public Hearing on Visitability a Success!

On March 4, the Housing Committee of the State General Assembly held a public hearing on a bill (HB 5372) that would provide incentives to home builders to construct single family homes that are “visitable”. State Representative Ken Green has taken an interest in the issue, and proposed the bill, in part because of his personal experience with adapting housing for a family member who uses a wheelchair. Green is the Co-Chair of the Housing Committee.

Speaking in support of the bill at the public hearing were the MS Society, the Commission on Aging, AARP, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the City of New Haven Department of Disability Services, the Office of Protection and Advocacy, the North Central Area Agency on Aging, and a number of other individuals and advocates.

What is visitability? Visitability is when a single family home has:

- One zero step entrance at front, rear, or side of house (could be through the garage)
- 32” clear width doorways and 36” wide halls throughout the main floor
- A bath on the main floor that provides access to toilet and sink

Visitability is a movement to change home construction practices so that new single family homes - not merely those custom-built for occupants who currently have disabilities - offer a few specific features that make the home easier for people who develop mobility disabilities to live in, and to make it possible for individuals with disabilities to visit family and friends.

The spirit of visitability proclaims that it is unacceptable that new homes continue to be built with barriers, given how easy it is to provide basic access in the great majority of new homes. It is also unacceptable given the harsh effects major barriers have on so many people's lives, especially the ever-increasing population of those who are acquiring disabilities as they age. These easily-avoided barriers cause unsafe living conditions, social isolation, and forced institutionalization.

For more information about visitability in Connecticut call Sue Salters at Independence Unlimited – 860-523-5021. The visitability initiative is being advocated by the North Central Disability Advocacy Network which is an arm of Independence Unlimited. The Network is a local affiliate of the Disability Advocacy Collaborative.

You Are Not Alone!

NAMI/CT is offering a free course that will provide vital information to parents and caregivers of children affected by mental health issues. In six 2 1/2 hour sessions, participants will learn about:

- Attention Deficit, Bipolar, Conduct, Oppositional Defiant, Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive and Substance Abuse Disorders, Major Depression, Childhood Schizophrenia, etc.
- Problem Solving, Listening and Communication Skills
- Advocating for your child in the School and Mental Health Systems
- Personal Record Keeping Systems
- Crisis Management and Relapse
- And Much, Much More...

A class in Waterbury will begin on Thursday, March 18th from 7:00 - 9:30 pm at The Village at East Farms in Waterbury. To register call Kim at 203-578-5447 or Eileen at 203-910-8229. There will also be a class in Avon beginning Thursday, April 8th from 6:30 - 9:00 pm at Valley Community Baptist Church, Fellowship Hall E & F, 590 W. Avon Rd. (RT 167), Avon. To register contact Marisa at 860-299-5705 or marisawalls@sbcglobal.net.

For more information about the NAMI-Basics educational course, please contact Paloma Dee at the NAMI-CT office or by email at familyeducation@namict.org.

Shared Ability Dance Project

New Haven Ballet has announced the return of its highly successful Shared Ability Dance Project for students with physical, intellectual, or emotional disabilities ages 12-20. The program brings together students with disabilities and student dancers from the New Haven Ballet Company for a series of workshops and rehearsals leading up to the spring performance at New Haven's Shubert Theater and on the main stage on the New Haven Green as part of the International Festival of Arts and Ideas.

The program begins on Saturday, March 20 from 4:00-5:30 pm at the Ballet's studios at 70 Audubon St. in New Haven with a free introductory workshop of a fun and stimulating series of warm up exercises, group dances, movement studies, and shared improvisations. The workshop is free and open to new students as well as dancers from last year's program. Space is limited so advanced registration is encouraged. Students with disabilities who wish to continue to dance with the New Haven Ballet Company may sign up after the workshop. Rehearsals will begin the following Saturday, March 27 from 4:00-5:30 pm and continue every Saturday with the performances at the Shubert Theater on Saturday, June 5 at 6:30 p.m., and the New Haven Green on Wednesday June 16, at noon.

To register for the introductory workshop on March 20, please email administrator@newhavenballet.org or call Ruth at 203-782-9038.

“Housing Plus Services” Forum March 24

As part of the 2010 “Housing: The Hub of Public Policy” Series, The Lyceum will host a Housing Plus Services forum on Wednesday, March 24 from 8:30 a.m. to noon. The forum will focus on policy recommendations for promoting systems change around creating independent living for the elderly and people with disabilities. Learn more at www.housingpolicy2010.org.

Sponsored by the Partnership for Strong Communities, the forum is a follow up to a related series in 2009. That series sparked the Partnership to join hands with the state Department of Economic and Community Development and the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to produce a 2010 series focused on practical solutions. The 2010 series will move beyond a demonstration of the interdisciplinary connections to a series of workshops that flesh out policy alternatives that can simultaneously solve housing problems and provide solutions for education, transportation, healthcare and other dilemmas.

Change in SILC Meeting Date

The State Independent Living Council has changed its March meeting date from the 31st to the 24th. It will be held at the Center for Disability Rights, 764A Campbell Ave., West Haven. The meeting will begin at 1:00 pm and end at 3:30 pm.

The SILC is also having a public hearing to gather information for the next State Plan for Independent Living on March 24th (same site) from 4:00 - 6:00 pm. There will also be an information gathering hearing on April 7th from 4:00 - 6:00 pm at 151 New Park Avenue in Hartford (the New Park Office and Conference Center).

For more information on the hearing contact the SILC office at (860) 523-0126 in Hartford or e-mail Debbie Melaragno at deb.ctsilc@gmail.com. Interpreter services will be provided.

SpEd Seminars for Parents in Fairfield County

FAVOR, Inc. will be offering two special education seminars for parents of children with disabilities in Fairfield County next month. Entitled “Navigating Special Education Law and Advocacy: Attorneys Representing Parents and School Boards Discuss the Issues”, the seminars will address what every parent should know about their child’s basic special education rights in and outside of school. Hear both sides of the story and learn how attorneys representing parents and school boards can work together to resolve various disputes.

One seminar is being offered on Wednesday, April 7, from 6:45 - 8:30 pm, at the Fairfield Public Library, 1080 Old Post Road, Fairfield, the other on April 26, also from 6:45 – 8:30 pm, at the Wilton Public Library, 137 Old Ridgefield Road, Wilton. Presenters will include Phillip J. Cohn, attorney representing parents, from the Law Office of Phillip J. Cohn, LLC, and Michelle Laubin, attorney representing school boards, from Berchem, Moses, & Devlin, P.C. The seminars are free, and reservations are suggested. To make a reservation for the Fairfield seminar, email

pcohn@mychildsrights.com or call 203-604-6770. To make a reservation for the Wilton seminar, email caclld@optonline.net.

FAVOR, Inc., is a non-profit statewide family advocacy organization serving families, children and youth dealing with a broad spectrum of behavioral and mental health needs.

School of Pharmacy Offers Program for Children on Autism Spectrum

On Friday, April 16th from 10:30 am - 3:00 pm, the UCONN School of Pharmacy in Storrs will hold an event for students of the transition age (16-21) who have a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism for a day of fun filled events. Beginning at 11:00 am, pharmacy students will give a presentation regarding the profession of pharmacy. This includes the duties of a pharmacist, how a pharmacist can help your son or daughter, and how important it is for students to understand their medication therapy. At 12:00 pm, lunch will be provided and then at 1:00 pm the teenagers will have the opportunity to participate in making a "medicine." They will be paired with one or two pharmacy students along with graduate students, and professors will be on hand for supervision.

If you feel your teenager would benefit from this program please RSVP to Jennifer Carroll, Statewide Coordinator of The Connecticut Family Support Network, jtcarroll@cox.net by Sunday, March 21. Because of the space limitations in the lab only twelve students will be allowed to participate in the program. Participation will be on a first come first served basis. If you have any questions regarding the event please feel free to contact Carlie Hershgordon, Pharmacy Student Government President - 267-577-4599 or Carlie.Hershgordon@gmail.com.

The 2010 Gunnar and Rosemary Dybwad Seminar Set for April 12

The 2010 Gunnar and Rosemary Dybwad Seminar will be held on Monday, April 12 from 3:30 – 6:30 pm at the Great Path Academy Community Commons Room (2nd floor) at Manchester Community College. The focus of this year's seminar is the positive role of the arts in the lives of all of us, especially children and adults with disabilities. The artwork of invited guest artists with disabilities will be highlighted. Each of the artists will share how art has enriched their lives and in some cases has become a career giving them meaning and income. The guest speaker/facilitator is well known local artist and MCC Adjunct Faculty member, Linda Bradley.

There is no fee to attend the seminar, but if you plan to attend, you are requested to pre-register by April 2. This Seminar is funded by the MCC Institute on Disability & Community Inclusion/Dybwad Fund. To register or to get more information call 860-512-2789.

ASCONN's 20th Annual Conference on Autism

The Autism Society of Connecticut will hold its 20th Annual Conference on Saturday, April 24 at the Hartford Marriot Downtown. Back by popular demand is Temple Grandin, arguably the most famous person with autism in America. She will speak on growing up and living with autism, her struggles, challenges and triumphs and most particularly on how we can help our

loved ones with autism to utilize their talents and strengths and lead successful, happy and productive lives.

Also on the bill is Dr. Peter Gerhardt, President of the Organization for Autism Research. OAR is dedicated to the promotion of applied research and dissemination of evidenced based information.

Additional information about the conference can be found at www.asconn.org.

BLN asks you to “Save the Date”

On Friday May 7, 2010 the Connecticut Business Leadership Network will host an Employment Conference & Career Fair at Manchester Community College. The Employment Conference will run from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm, with the Career Fair following from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm. There will be tracks for jobseekers and for employers, and workshops on topics such as reasonable accommodation, ADA Compliance, and interviewing skills.

For more information contact Melissa Marshall, BLN Executive Director at (860)-561-1232, melissa.marshall@snet.net, or visit the BLN website: www.ctbln.com.

Important Survey Regarding Your Child's Healthcare

The Connecticut Family Support Network (CFSN), in partnership with the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), is interested in learning about your experiences in obtaining health care for your child with special health care needs. If interested, use the following link to fill out this confidential survey, which should only take a few minutes to complete:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB229TTHP9E7X>.

The CFSN reports that your responses to the survey will be anonymous, and will only be viewed by the limited research study staff. Your responses will not be attributed to you by name in any written, verbal, or electronic communications or publications.

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month!

In recognition of Brain Injury Awareness Month, the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut is launching a statewide education and prevention campaign: "A Concussion is a Brain Injury. Get the Facts." as a part of the month's activities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 3.5 million sports-related concussions occur each year in the U.S. Yet despite these statistics, many children and their parents do not know the facts about concussions.

With so much education still to be accomplished the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut invites readers to join their awareness campaign by participating in this month's activities. BIAC has posted new concussion materials along with posters, fact sheets, and brochures. To find out more, go to: <http://biact.homestead.com/Brain-Injury-Awareness-Month.html>.

BIAC staff are available for visits to schools or organizations to talk about ways to prevent brain injuries. These age-appropriate programs are offered free of charge to all Connecticut schools.

For further information, contact Virginia Longo, Education and Outreach Director, Brain Injury Association of CT, 333 East River Road, East Hartford, CT 06108 (phone: 860-721-8111 ext 302 or e-mail vlongo@biact.org).

2010 Mini Grants Now Available

The Board of Directors of the Autism Society of Connecticut (ASCONN) is accepting applications for grants up to \$1,000 for parents, family members, persons with autism, or anyone working with persons on the autism spectrum. Funds must be used to purchase items or services that directly relate to the safety and security of persons with autism or their families within Connecticut. Examples of appropriate items, activities or services include:

- Purchasing of safety equipment for a home (i.e., fence, key locks, window alarms and other safety equipment);
- Purchasing of safety equipment for a person with autism (i.e., ID bracelet, tracking bracelet or equipment);
- Purchasing of safety equipment for other community places serving persons with autism (i.e., fence, key locks, alarms, walkie-talkies, other safety equipment);
- Purchasing of specialty car seats, strollers, head gear and other equipment;
- Training of personnel (within the home or other community places serving persons with autism) in proper physical management techniques;
- Training of community responders about autism.

Questions concerning this grant should be directed to Sara Reed, Mini-Grant Coordinator, at 888-453-4975 or e-mail ASCONN@sbcglobal.net.

Abilities Expo Coming to NJ in May

The 2010 New York Metro Abilities Expo will be held at the New Jersey Convention and Expo Center from May 21 – 23. Friday's opening day schedule will run from 11 am – 5 pm, Saturday's schedule is from 10 am – 5 pm, and Sunday from 11 am – 4 pm.

For more than three decades, Abilities Expo has succeeded in improving the lives of Americans with disabilities, their families, caregivers and healthcare professionals. The unique forum features cutting-edge products and services, compelling workshops, and fun-for-the-whole-family activities. It has become the leading event for the community of people with disabilities. Abilities Expo reaches out to all ages and all sectors of the community including wounded veterans, persons recovering from immobilizing accidents, seniors with age-related health concerns, children with disabilities, individuals with mobility and spinal issues, people who have vision and hearing impairments, people with developmental disabilities and many more.

For more information go to: www.abilitiesexpo.com/newyork/index.html.

Melville Supportive Housing Investment Act Update

The U.S. Senate Banking Committee will likely mark up the Frank Melville Supportive Housing Investment Act this spring in an effort to pass the authorizing language to improve HUD's Section 811 program designed to provide affordable housing for people with disabilities. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force is hopeful the Senate will pass the legislation by unanimous consent.

The Frank Melville Supportive Housing Investment Act, introduced in the House by Congressman Chris Murphy and passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in June 2009, would improve the Section 811 program, with the promise of creating thousands of units of affordable housing units for low-income people with disabilities. The legislation proposes changes that would allow the program to more effectively leverage federal, state, and local resources for supportive housing and streamline processing requirements.

Defending our Freedom

Eleven years ago, in the Olmstead decision, the U.S. Supreme Court said that Americans with disabilities have the right to live in the most integrated setting. Yet today, states, including Connecticut, are responding to budget shortfalls by drastically cutting home and community-based services (see above). These draconian cuts are forcing seniors and people with disabilities into nursing facilities and other institutional settings because they don't have the services they need in the community to remain independent. As states cut vital services, the federal government, which is charged with protecting our civil rights and enforcing the law, is simply standing by - silent - while Americans with disabilities have their most basic freedoms taken away.

Defending Our Freedom is a three-prong national campaign initiated by ADAPT to organize the disability community to:

- Demand that the Obama administration fulfill its duty to aggressively protect the civil rights of disabled Americans and enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act/Olmstead decision;
- File complaints with the Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice that document the violation of rights of individuals who have been forced into institutional settings, denied community services, or have had their community services reduced as well as complaints that document the state policies and budget cuts that violate our rights; and
- Document the disability community's efforts to fight back against state cuts so that we can learn from each other's efforts, rally others to join our fight, and hold public officials accountable when they do not support our freedom.

You can keep up on what groups are doing by reading the blog:
www.defendingourfreedom2010.blogspot.com .

National Health Care Reform

The House and Senate Democratic leadership continues to work to secure sufficient votes to pass a comprehensive health reform measure. The House is expected to vote on the bill passed by the Senate first, followed by Senate consideration of a reconciliation bill. The reconciliation bill will include the President's proposal and some changes to the original Senate bill desired by House Democrats.

None of these votes are expected to be easy. Many House Democratic health care supporters do not like the Senate version. To move the bill to passage, the House Democratic leadership has no other options than to pass the Senate bill as the first step to enactment. Most House Democrats want a firm agreement that the Senate will pass a revised package under reconciliation.

Another potential roadblock could be the cost estimate of the proposals which the non partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) will produce after it receives the final bill language. The Democratic leadership in both Houses and President Obama are pressing to complete action by March 27, when a two week Passover/Easter recess begins. Republicans in both Houses have promised to delay the process at each stage, hoping to ultimately derail the entire health care reform initiative.

Some of the issues still on the table that have special meaning for individuals with disabilities and families include:

- Major insurance market reforms including elimination of pre-existing condition exclusions and annual and lifetime caps;
- Coverage of rehabilitation and habilitation services and devices in the essential benefits package for the new insurance Exchange;
- An expansion of Medicaid eligibility up to 133% of the federal poverty level;
- The Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act which will establish a new nation-wide long term services insurance program that will help individuals and their families meet their needs without needing to be impoverished;
- The Community First Choice (CFC) Medicaid option which will make comprehensive community-based services available to Medicaid beneficiaries in states which chose the option (it would begin on Oct 1, 2010 with no sunset date); and
- Requiring the development of standards for accessible diagnostic and other medical equipment.

Need Help with Your Taxes?

It's income tax season and once again United Way of Connecticut (UWC) is providing information on tax credits, free income tax assistance and tax forms. UWC is participating in the Tax Credit Outreach Campaign to inform and educate families about their eligibility for federal

tax credits. 2-1-1 will provide information on the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

To learn more or for a referral to a free tax preparation site dial 2-1-1 or visit www.ctunitedway.org/taxes.

Protect Medicaid AND Help the Economy

The Disability Policy Collaboration, a joint project of The Arc of the U.S. and United Cerebral Palsy, reports that temporarily increasing the federal matching rate for Medicaid is one of the most effective ways to help the economy and to protect citizens who are most in need. This is why the 2009 economic stimulus law (P.L. 111-5) included \$87 billion to increase the federal government's share of Medicaid spending.

The economic stimulus law's temporary increase in the federal matching rate (known as the federal medical assistance percentage, or FMAP) is scheduled to end on December 31, 2010 - right when families most need help and state budgets are in crisis. Without an extension, most states will be forced to severely cut their Medicaid budgets resulting in loss of direct support professional jobs and services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Last week, the U.S. Senate was scheduled to vote on a bill, called the Tax Extenders Act of 2009 (HR 4213), that includes a 6-month FMAP increase extension to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's (ARRA). That bill would allow states to sustain Medicaid without making additional eligibility or enrollment cuts, and generate additional business activity, jobs, and wages as dollars are spent for home/health care personnel, including Medicaid physicians and direct support workers.

Restraint and Seclusion

In a great victory for disability and civil rights advocates, the U.S. House of Representatives passed HR 4247, The Keeping All Students Safe Act (formerly, the Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act), by a vote of 262-153. The bill, which would set the first federal safety standards on restraint and seclusion in schools, now goes to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee.

For four years the Collaborative was supported in a number of different ways by Communitas, Inc. To George, Pat and Bev we extend our deep appreciation.